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## Issue Paper

Subject: Helmet Stories

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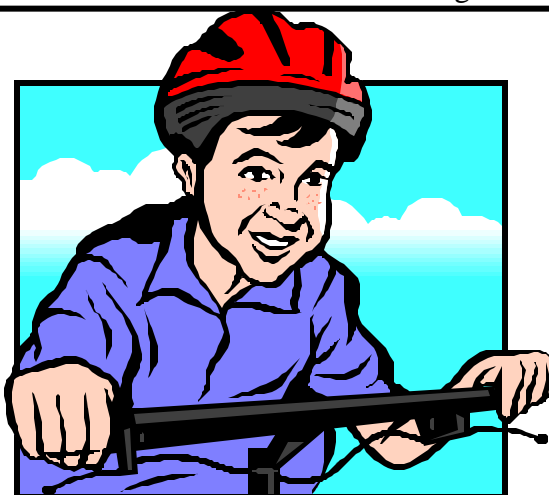
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## Bike Helmet Stories

Rather than pummel your brain with statistics about why you and your kids should be wearing bike helmets when you ride to school, work, or just for fun, here are some stories from survivors:

"Hi! My name is Austin Kamykowski. When I was in sixth grade, I was an honor student. I played on the All Star Little League Team as a pitcher and on a competition soccer team. I used to ride my bike but I didn't like to wear a bike helmet. My mother tried to persuade me to wear one but I thought helmets were uncomfortable and hot. None of my friends wore bike helmets and I didn't exactly want to look like a jerk. Let me tell you how really wrong I was.....

"On September 12, 1994, I went bike riding with my brother and a friend. I took a left-hand turn and started pedaling up the street when I got hit by a pick-up truck. My head got whipped back and forth, damaging many parts of my brain. I was actually near death when the ambulance got me to the hospital. My mother was told to go in and kiss me good-bye because they didn't think I would live more than a few hours. I was hurt very badly and slipped into a coma. I suffered a traumatic brain injury all because I had not been wearing a bike helmet. A respirator did my breathing, a tube in my



stomach fed me, and a bolt in my head monitored the swelling in my brain.

"When I finally woke up I had to be taught to eat, walk, talk and think all over again. I spent months in a wheelchair and had to rely on everyone else to do things for me. I spent my days enduring painful physical therapy sessions and longed to be normal again. When I first got hit all my friends paid attention to me, but slowly they all disappeared.

"It's been four years now since my accident. Although I have made a remarkable recovery, I am very different as a result of that accident. I will never pitch another baseball game because my right arm won't work. I have had to settle for managing the soccer team instead of playing because my balance and speed are impaired. I am in special education classes because my

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injured brain cannot keep up in the regular classes. I will never be able to ride a bike or even drive a car. I still endure painful physical therapy sessions every week.

"I'd like to leave you with a very important message.... No kid should ever have to go through what I did and am still doing. All of this pain and trouble that I am forced to deal with now could have been avoided if I had only worn a bike helmet. My message is simple, 'Please wear a bike helmet...Because I said so!'" - Austin

"I was out riding my bike and I wasn't paying attention. I ran into a car mirror, and it knocked me off (my bike). I hit my head, and my helmet cracked and split in half, but all that happened was I had a broken finger.

"I didn't want to wear my bike helmet. I didn't think it was cool. But my Mom said if I didn't wear it I would be grounded from riding my bike. I think it saved me maybe from brain damage. Would I recommend that other kids wear a bike helmet? Yes. And I'd recommend that *I* wear one." - *Justin S., age 12, St. Louis, MO*

"When I flew nine feet through the air and hit the pavement head first, I broke my bike helmet instead of my head. If I hadn't been wearing a helmet, there is a good chance I would have been killed or injured too seriously to ever ride a bike again." - *Payton B., age 12, Bethesda, MD*

"Last Spring I was riding my bike up and down my block pedaling side to side. All of a sudden my bike made an unexpected turn and I crashed down toward the street. My bike helmet landed on a mound of asphalt. My helmet now has a large puncture, and my skinned knees have healed. Had my bike helmet not been on or properly secured, I would have hit my face or smashed my head." - *Alison W., age 11, Bethesda, MD*

"We thought you was dead. You bounced off that guardrail twice while you

were still on the bike and several more times after you left it. Then you just laid there still."

"This is what the store owner told me when I revisited the scene a year after my crash. In 1989, I was on the second day of a weekend club ride when I caught some gravel in the middle of a high-speed curve. I was going about 35 mph when I slammed into the guardrail. I remember hitting it once and then lying on the road with people standing over me asking my name. It was two hours before the helicopter arrived that would take me to a hospital in Scottsdale. I spent the next three weeks in bed dressed like a mummy. It took two hours to change the bandages and they had to be changed twice a day. Just about the only part of my body that wasn't injured was my head. My helmet was cracked in the back and the finish was scraped off both sides. There is no question that it saved my life." - *Reed K., age 49, Mesa, AZ*

The kids' stories and a lot of very good information on bicycle helmets can be found at <http://www.bikehelmet.org/>. Two other sites are <http://www.bhsi.org/index.htm> and <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/outreach/KidsPage/>.

For more information on this and other bicycle related topics, contact:

Reed Kempton

Bicycle / Multi-Modal Planner

Maricopa County Department of Transportation

2901 W. Durango St.

Phoenix, AZ 85009-6357

602-506-1630

[reedkempton@mail.maricopa.gov](mailto:reedkempton@mail.maricopa.gov)

[www.mcdot.maricopa.gov/bicycle/bike.htm](http://www.mcdot.maricopa.gov/bicycle/bike.htm)